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THE EDUCATIONAL VALUE OF EXAMINATIONS FOR ADMISSION TO COLLEGE.

EXAMINATIONS are presumably means to an end, not an end in themselves. Their value will be determined by the service they render in the attainment of the desired ends. In school work the interested parties are the pupil who is entitled to make the most of himself, the teacher whose professional reputation is at stake, and the school or educational system which is supported directly or indirectly by the public for the public good.

There can be no doubt of the educational value of examinations to those who conduct the examinations. Our daily experience shows conclusively enough that success in life depends largely upon the critical acumen which precedes and influences judgment. Perhaps this is one reason (it is hardly becoming in me to make the suggestion) why colleges cling so tenaciously to the privilege of examining candidates for admission.

But seriously, it is good for a boy occasionally to have to pass formal examinations. He may some day want to be a civil servant—a policeman, a street-sweeper, or a teacher (this is not intended to be an anti-climax)—and then he will be required to come to terms with a list of questions and an examining board. Moreover, he will have frequent use in life for the ability to conceal his own ignorance. And when we consider, in the words of Richard Baxter, “how very little it is that we know in comparison to that we are ignorant of,” it will be seen that the ability to veneer this vast body of ignorance with a respectable coating of usable information is an accomplishment not lightly to be regarded. It might also be mentioned in this appreciation of the educational value of examinations (*for those who are examined*) that there is nothing more likely to take the conceit out of a fellow than a try at a paper

¹ A paper read before the Association of Colleges and Preparatory Schools in the Middle States and Maryland at a meeting held in Baltimore, November 28, 1902.

set by persons whom he doesn't know in a subject which he thinks he does know. As a modern philosopher has remarked: "A reasonable amount of fleas is good for a dog; they keep him f'm broodin' on bein' a dog."

The topic assigned me, as I understand it, excludes the consideration of examinations given in the course of instruction for the purpose of making that instruction more efficient. Such tests as written recitations, quizzes, term, and final examinations and the like are of the greatest value to the teacher who is really concerned in educating his pupils. These examinations are indispensable; they need no argument to justify the position they hold in our scheme of instruction. But examinations conducted by outside authorities are in another category. They, too, may have a place and be valuable, but the justification must come from some other source.

From the standpoint of the pupil, examinations conducted by persons outside the school are far and away more harmful than helpful. I grant that they do tend to keep lazy boys up to the scratch, to show the conceited how little they know, to train the nervous and scatterbrained to hold themselves in and do something on time: in short, they do help a boy to pull himself together and concentrate himself on a task which requires all strength and ingenuity. But what is it all worth in comparison with the attendant evils? The tendency to substitute for high ideals in scholarship a mere caricature of learning, to put forward a mechanical process as the *summum bonum* of the school course, to replace clear thinking by guesswork, to regard the examiner as a person to be satisfied at any cost—honestly, if possible, dishonestly, if necessary. Any scheme that puts a premium on success at a particular time or under peculiar conditions, strains the moral fiber. It is certainly good for moral fiber to withstand a strain; but, when for sake of reward or fear of failure the strain becomes unendurable, the result is altogether bad. The recent experience of an eastern preparatory school is by no means exceptional, save in the extent of the fault and the publicity given to it. The relation between candidate and examiner does not promote high moral standards, witness the

need of proctors and the unwillingness of boys, even college students, to assume the moral responsibility of taking examinations without watchers. The overseers of a New England College (Tufts) have recently published the following criticism of prevailing student customs :

It is well understood that the student body in most colleges has always sanctioned a highly artificial code of morals which thoughtful men would repudiate at once in the domain of business or of society. This peculiar code, which tolerates cheating in examinations, justifies the destruction of private property in the celebration of athletic victories, encourages boorish manners, and various forms of reprehensible conduct and causes strained relations between professors and students, was perhaps a natural outgrowth of the inflexible curriculum and the paternal form of college government which prevailed until comparatively recent years.

The situation is a relic of that educational barbarism which assumed no honesty in the scholar, and no sympathy in the master.

On this point, therefore, let there be no misunderstanding. To the boy who is examined by outside authorities *for the sake of personal gain*, there can be no benefit worth mentioning which cannot be secured equally well in some less reprehensible way ; but, on the contrary, the process tends to lower our intellectual and moral standards, a fact which, through long familiarity, we have come to minimize or to entirely disregard.

But, as I have said, there is a place for examinations, and in that place they have a distinct value. *Outside examinations are imperative whenever the secondary schools are unable or unwilling to assume the responsibility of meeting the requirements for admission to colleges and universities.* If good work is to be done in our colleges and professional schools, a suitable foundation must be laid in the field of secondary education. If the secondary schools will not, or cannot, assure the strength of that foundation, then it is imperative that the higher institutions impose their own tests. Weak schools, of course, may be left out of consideration. But why, it may be asked, should any secondary school refuse to certify to the strength of its candidates, if it is capable of doing so ? Several reasons at once suggest themselves : lack of knowledge of what the higher education really demands, modesty

in proclaiming one's own belief, unwillingness to be tacitly responsible for work over which one has no control, inability to withstand the importunity of ambitious parents, adherence to collegiate customs, and so on through a long catalogue. We have all heard them many times, and in many forms, varying from the modest excuse to the utterly imbecile apology.

So trivial do some of the reasons seem, and so out of harmony with the character of the men who put them forth that I have concluded to look deeper for the true cause of the apparent unwillingness of certain secondary-school masters to stand sponsor for their scholars. When the principal of a large high school tells me that he has more important work to do than to satisfy the crotchets of some college professor, I can see an obvious reason for his position, but when the master of a school avowedly preparatory to college, and well assured of its patronage, tells me that he prefers outside judgment as to who of his pupils shall go to college, I am at a loss to understand his meaning without appeal to first principles.

The great public schools of England—Eton, Harrow, Rugby, and the rest—have long been ideal fitting schools. Their ideal is, I need hardly say, out and out English; it is not French; it is not German; it is not American, but it is a type which finds sympathy and support everywhere.

An Englishman, high in the councils of the government, has recently said:¹

We have never made an idol of intellectual instruction imparted in day schools. In other words, our great educators have upheld the belief (though we are far from having lived up to all that the belief implies) that a school ought to be something higher than a knowledge factory; that what a man *is* matters a great deal more than what he *knows*. That wise actions involve many vital elements besides intellectual attainments; and that education, in the true sense of the word, is an atmosphere and a discipline affecting heart, and mind and body, and neglecting none of the three.

Again he says:²

We are in the habit of liking our national life to be so arranged as to allow as much freedom as possible for every gifted individual to express himself according to his inborn faculty. This means that we prefer untidy

¹ DR. SADLER, *Special Reports*, Vol. IX, p. 9. ² P. 501.

freedom to an immaculately neat system of restraints. We resent the idea of pressing boys or girls to learn a great deal at school. We believe in the value of a good deal of well-employed idleness during early years.

In other words the master has much more to do in school than to give instruction, and for the boy there is a larger and more important life than the life of the class-room. Kipling portrays that life most admirably in *The Brushwood Boy*:

Ten years in an English school do not encourage dreaming. Georgie won his growth and chest measurement, and a few other things which did not appear on the bills, under a system of cricket, football, and paper chases, from four to five days a week, which provided for three lawful cuts of a ground-ash if any boy absented himself from these entertainments. . . . At last he blossomed into full glory as head of the school, *ex officio* captain of the games, head of his house, where he and his lieutenants preserved discipline and decency among seventy boys from twelve to seventeen; general arbiter in the quarrels which spring up among the touchy Sixth, and intimate friend and ally of the Head himself. . . . Above all, he was responsible for that thing called the tone of the school, and few realize with what passionate devotion a certain type of boy throws himself into this work. Home was a far-away country, full of ponies and fishing and shooting, and men-visitors, who interfered with one's plans; but school was the real world, where things of vital importance happened, and crises arose that must be dealt with promptly and quietly. . . . and Georgie was glad to be back in authority when the holidays ended. Behind him, but not too near, was the wise and temperate Head, now suggesting the wisdom of the serpent, now counseling the mildness of the dove; leading him on to see, more by half-hints than by any direct word, how boys and men are all of a piece, and how he who can handle the one will assuredly in time control the other.

For the rest, the school was not encouraged to dwell on its emotions, but rather to keep in hard condition, to avoid false quantities, and to enter the army direct, without the help of the expensive London crammer, under whose roof young blood learns too much. Cottar, *major*, went the way of hundreds before him. The Head gave him six months' final polish, taught him what kind of answers best please a certain kind of examiners, and handed him over to the properly constituted authorities, who passed him into Sandhurst. He did not know that he bore with him from school and college a character worth much fine gold, but was pleased to find his mess so kindly. He had plenty of money of his own; his training had set the public-school mask upon his face, and had taught him how many were the "things no fellow can do." By virtue of the same training he kept his pores open and his mouth shut.

This little sketch of Kipling's is, I believe, the best portrait of the English public school in existence. He puts duty, com-

mon sense, character, in the foreground, as the great ends to be desired in education. Hence, his *Praise of Famous Men*:

And we all praise famous men—
Ancients of the college;
For they taught us common sense—
Tried to teach us common sense—
Truth and God's Own Common Sense
Which is more than knowledge.

This we learned from famous men
Knowing not its uses
When they showed in daily work
Man must finish off his work—
Right or wrong, his daily work—
And without excuses.

This we learned from famous men
Teaching in our borders,
Who declared it was the best,
Safest, easiest, and the best,—
Expeditious, wise and best,—
To obey your orders.

This we learned from famous men
Knowing not we learned it,
Only, as the years went by—
Lonely, as the years went by—
Far from help as the years went by
Plainer we discerned it.

Wherefore praise we famous men
From whose bays we borrow—
They that put aside Today—
All the joys of their Today—
And with toil of their Today—
Bought for us Tomorrow.

Such an ideal of education as this demands, indeed, famous men as teachers. They are men who cannot be harnessed to a system or hampered by restraints. The master is the school, and because masters differ, the schools will not conform to an accepted norm. A few succeed; others overreach themselves and are lamentable failures. Under such a system intellectual attainment ranks as one aim among many, and it is conceivable that it may not always be the most important one. Strength of char-

acter, honesty, integrity, physical prowess, the ability to lead one's fellows, cannot be relegated to second rank in any system of education. Moreover, the intimacy between master and scholar in a good home school—an intimacy which, in the course of years, ripens into an affection that is akin to parental love—makes it extremely difficult for the teacher to judge the boy from one standpoint only. He knows him too well; his faults and his virtues are spread before him in an open book. To single out one attainment on which to predict the future is to neglect others which will surely tell as time goes on. How can the master, under such conditions, be a righteous judge? So it happens that in such a system of education examinations conducted by higher authorities come easily and naturally to be the culmination of the school course.

Say what we will about the English school system, we Americans do believe in the best ideals of English education. There is something in "Tom Brown's School Days" which thrills us as schoolmasters even more than when we were schoolboys. We are ready to say, and we generally mean it, that what a man *is* is of far more consequence than what he *knows*. We believe that the making of man is the chief end of school work, and we are not unwilling to borrow methods from those who seem to be successful in making a certain type of Englishman.

But notwithstanding our admiration for some things in English education, we cannot accept all that the system implies: class distinctions; "boarding schools for those who are to be leaders in Church and State, day schools of an inferior sort for the masses;" separation of the sexes whenever possible; interference of a state church; low ideals of scholarship. Some of those we regard not so much a fault of English education as of English life, but bad teaching is certainly the work of poor teachers.

It has been remarked that in judging a teacher, the German asks, What does he know? the American, What can he do? the Englishman, Is he a good fellow? Dr. Sadler, whose office in England corresponds to that of Dr. Harris in this country, says on this point:³

³*Special Reports*, Vol. IX, pp. 10, 11.

No schoolmasters in the world lavish more time and thought and strength on the care of their pupils than the English secondary schoolmasters. On what may be called the pastoral side of their office, they are beyond rivalry. . . . But because the English secondary schoolmaster so often lives among his pupils from morning to night, he has far less time and strength to spare for professional studies than has his continental counterpart. He is much more the friend of his pupils, and much fresher in his sympathies with the interests of young people. But he is far less of a student ; as a rule, is much less learned ; and is often a hardened amateur in his methods of teaching Clumsy, antiquated methods of instruction are far too common in our secondary schools.

For the remedy he points his countrymen to Germany and extols German scholarship and German thoroughness.

The Germans have succeeded in getting a much larger proportion of their people to go through an advanced course of instruction than is the case in England They have managed to inculcate scientific habits of mind and a disposition towards intellectual organization and co-operation to a degree quite unparalleled here They have skilfully applied education as an instrument in furthering their commercial and industrial interests. . . . We shall find ourselves virtually compelled by their action to replace much of our old educational machinery by something which works more economically and turns out a more modern fabric¹ The strength of German education lies in its great tradition of disinterested devotion to knowledge in the self-sacrificing labours of the teachers ; . . . and in the infinite capacity for taking pains, which (whether innate or the result of a long tradition of educational discipline) is characteristic of so many German minds.

"The German schools," he points out,² "could never have become what they are today, had it not been for the high intellectual qualifications of the teachers, and for the care taken to weed out those who are lacking in professional aptitude for the work of teaching." It is for an intellectual tradition, as persistent and congenial as the ethical tradition which characterizes the best English education, that Dr. Sadler pleads:³

The development of individual intelligence is largely a question of methods of teaching, but also of choice of studies. Educational efficiency of the best kind depends on having small classes ; highly trained teachers ; skilful methods of teaching ; not too many subjects ; the right order of subjects ; the right choice of subjects ; and the avoidance of hurry ; of excessive competition, and of intellectual overstrain The keen study of methods

¹*Special Reports*, Vol. IX, p. 55. ²*Ibid.*, p. 71. ³*Ibid.*, pp. 163, 164.

by teachers is one of the best signs of educational progress. But the aim should be, not to enable the pupil to win a prize or a scholarship by a certain time, or to pass in some competitive examination (though I am far from meaning to imply that all competition is bad or that all examinations could be dispensed with) but to start him in the right way of learning things for himself, to arouse his interest in important subjects, and to give him a sure foundation of accurate and well-directed knowledge. Large numbers of our secondary schools are worried by a superfluity of examinations. It would be far better to have some well-defined intellectual aim for each school, and to allow the teachers to work steadily and quietly toward that aim.

I have quoted thus at length from a high English authority, to show how conscious some Englishmen are of the great defects in English education. His verdict is, in a word, (1) low ideals of scholarship and (2) bad teaching. Both lead naturally and inevitably to the curse of examinations systematized and conducted by authority of the state or university.

Little wonder that the Englishman in seeking for light should turn to Germany. German education is strong precisely where English education is weak. The one system lacks just what the other can give. All the world knows what German universities stand for: investigation, research, pure scholarship. But the German secondary school is the foundation upon which the German university stands. It has its own intellectual traditions and points to a long line of scholarly schoolmasters, the finest class-room teachers in the world. Here are blended the scholarly attainments and skill in teaching, which the Englishman and the American must admire and ought to covet. No lecturing or hearing recitations in a German school; the teacher is there to instruct. And instruction means to the pupil the acquisition of useful information—knowledge systematized and directed toward some end which is itself worthy of attainment. Hence the German teacher points out the way; the pupil follows his instructions confidently knowing that there is no better way. The work in class day by day is not guess-work; there is no dawdling over lessons out of school, no juggling with problems in mathematics or thumbing of lexicons to make sense out of a foreign-language exercise. The teacher has a purpose, and that purpose is to see to it that his pupils learn what for the time being is most important for them to know.

With teachers who know what to teach and how and when to teach it, there is no need for outside examinations to decide the matter of promotion or graduation. At the end of each year, the class teachers, in a German secondary school, determine who in their opinion are qualified to do the work of the next higher class, and at the end of the course, candidates for the university are passed on or held back by verdict of the teachers of the highest class. There is a final examination, to be sure, conducted under the supervision of a state official ; but the questions are set by the teachers of the candidates on the work of the preceding year and the results are weighed and estimated by these same teachers. But so nicely is part adjusted to part in this great system that there is likely to be no greater variation in the attainments of boys coming up to the universities from different schools, than of those coming from any particular school.

Say what we will of the German school system, of its inflexibility, its subserviency to state control, its military character, we Americans do admire its adherence to high ideals of scholarship, its appreciation of the teacher's profession, and its success in methods of teaching. We recognize that it is a piece of finely adjusted machinery and that in the attainment of German aims, better means could hardly be devised. We have shown our appreciation in enduring forms : Andrew D. White says that, intellectually, Germany is the second mother of the United States.⁴ "More than any other country, Germany has made the universities and technical high schools of America what they now are—a powerful force in the development of American civilization." It is German influence, too, working in the realm of higher education, which has propounded to the secondary schools some of the most vexing questions of the past decade.

We Americans are, as Mr. Kipling puts it, "mixed peoples with all the vices of men and boys combined." But along with the vices go virtues, which our schoolmasters steadily keep to the front. We may be ethically English, intellectually German, but we are naturally, if accidentally, American, We believe in

⁴ London *Times*, December 1, 1900.

the doctrine of equal opportunity for all men, and for every boy and girl who can use it we believe it an educational ladder reaching from the kindergarten to the university. That ideal at least is not English and it is certainly not German. We believe in helping each pupil to make the most of his opportunities and to become that which he wishes to be, providing his aim is not too obviously harmful to his fellows. We set up no barriers, social or otherwise, to hamper his progress, and we never regard his career as ended until he is safely under ground. There is no "culmination" in American life short of death itself. Our school system, therefore, if it is to fit for American life, can have no bounds. We have no right to speak of the "culmination" of a school course, unless we mean thereby, in college parlance, a "commencement." And least of all should we think of examinations as the culmination of anything educational.

Let us reason together about this thing—this relic of educational barbarism. It comes to us with the English stamp not yet effaced; it bespeaks a tradition of poor scholarship and bad teaching. It is enforced by institutions which are more than half "made in Germany," but which are complacent enough to suppose that German scholarship can be erected on a secondary education, the sole guarantee of which is an examination for college entrance, or in lieu thereof, as was once remarked in a meeting of this association, "the good looks of the candidate." Is it not more reasonable to suppose that when we succeed in evolving an American system of education—really American, I mean, not a mere cross or hybrid—it will be a unity? a system necessarily made up of constituent parts, but so nicely adjusted that part will work with part in organic unison? When that time comes I venture to predict we shall hear nothing of examination for admission to any grade or to any school, but much will be said of examinations for instruction and promotion. The elementary school will pass on its pupils into the secondary school, and the secondary school will admit them to college, if that be their proper aim. Or, more properly speaking, scholars who are let out of one grade or school will admit themselves to the grade or school next higher? Already we hear it said that graduates

of any good four-year high-school course should find a college course open to them. I accept the statement, and should be glad to add to it these words—"without examination by college authorities."

But before these words can be added, the American public must see to it that the high-school course is really good, and that the teachers, in point of character, scholarship, and professional ability, are really worthy of the positions they occupy, and of the hire which they ought to have. In the meantime, it is our duty to be righteously discontent with our present schemes of state inspection, regents' examinations, college entrance boards, and the like, knowing them all to be dispensations of Providence, calculated to keep us humble, and fit us for a more blessed state. The millenium is not yet in sight, but the advance made in recent years in the matter of uniform entrance requirements, and especially in the establishment of the College Entrance Board, is most gratifying. But while we are waiting, let us be honest enough to confess that all these examination schemes are devices, as some say, to impress upon a doubting world the great importance of certain indispensable institutions of higher learning, or the acknowledgment, as others declare, of the shortcomings of American secondary schools, and the incapacity of American secondary schoolmasters.

To sum up: Examinations must have a place in every scheme of instruction. Instruction can proceed only when the extent and quality of the learner's knowledge is definitely understood. Every recitation, every review, is such an examination; further examinations of a formal sort are often desirable for the sake both of the teacher and of the pupil. But such examinations are given by teachers within the school or school system and primarily for the purpose of instruction. Examinations by those outside the school, especially when given for the purpose of determining a pupil's ability to undertake an entirely new course of instruction, have no educational value *for the pupil* which cannot be secured equally well in some less reprehensible way. Such examinations, however, are practically necessary when intellectual attainment is not the only aim of school instruction,

and both necessary and inevitable when that instruction is inefficient. Outside examinations are imperative whenever the secondary schools are unable or unwilling to assume the responsibility of meeting the requirements for admission to colleges and universities. Until a norm of secondary instruction is established and generally recognized, college entrance examinations cannot be dispensed with. The sole object of this paper is to show that such examinations have no especial educational value for those who are examined; they do have a distinct value in our school system and must be retained until some better plan is found for keeping weak schools up to grade and for the elimination of bad teaching. The scheme of college entrance examinations is altogether a matter of temporary expediency. It tests merely the candidate's store of learning and to some extent his ability to use that learning; it does not measure his intellectual desires, his moral strength or his æsthetic taste. Meanwhile it is our duty to find some way of assuring the intellectual ability which students must have on admission to college and at the same time of encouraging the preparatory schools to emphasize in their course of training the manly virtues and the liberal culture which all men need in life.

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